

Honor Journalists For Promoting Freedom, Keeping Government Power In Check

WASHINGTON, DC - U.S. Congressman Mike Pence (R-IN) and U.S. Congressman Adam Schiff (D-CA), co-chairmen of the Congressional Caucus for Freedom of the Press, released the following joint statement on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day:

"World Press Freedom Day has been observed for sixteen years now and serves as a reminder to us all of the vital importance of this core freedom. It is a day in which we celebrate the indispensable role played by journalists in exposing abuses of power, while at the same time we sound the alarm about the growing number of journalists that are still being silenced by death or jail as they attempt to bring daily news to the public.

"Since this day was first celebrated, 692 journalists have been killed. Adding to this tragic figure are the hundreds more each year who face intimidation, censorship, and arbitrary arrest - guilty of nothing more than a passion for truth and a tenacious belief that a free society depends on an informed citizenry.

"Our government must promote freedom of the press by putting on center stage those countries in which journalists are killed, imprisoned, kidnapped, threatened, or censored-and we have introduced legislation to do just that. The "Daniel Pearl Freedom of the Press Act" (H.R. 1861) is named in honor of former Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl who was kidnapped and murdered by terrorists in Pakistan, just four months after the September 11th attacks. This legislation will establish an annual State Department report on the status of press freedom in every country in the world and create a grant program aimed at broadening and strengthening the independence of journalists and media organizations.

"For Americans, this day should spur us to consider the role that journalists play in our society and to ponder what our nation would be like if this cornerstone of our liberty were to be curtailed. Many Americans take the concept of a free press for granted and don't realize that much of the world's population is not as fortunate as we are when it comes to access to independent news.

"On this day we remember reporters like Roxana Saberi, Laura Ling and Euna Lee. Miss Saberi is an American journalist in Iran, who was arrested in February, and is being held on baseless charges of espionage. Laura Ling and Euna Lee are being held in North Korea, similarly accused of spying. We condemn these trumped up charges and call for the immediate release of these journalists. These cases underscore the importance of preserving the check on government power that a free and independent press provides.

"We pay tribute to these and other repressed journalists-saluting their bravery and reflecting upon their role in advancing fundamental human rights around the world. We say to them: 'The U.S. House of Representatives stands with you as you work to foster democracy and we will do our part to promote freedom, not only for journalists but for those whom they serve.'"